



**Grade Level:**  
4th and 5th

**Time:**  
98 Minutes

**Season:**  
All

**Objectives:**  
Students will be able to...

- Understand the roles of salmon in the food web
- Recall an interaction over multiple trophic levels for a salmon life stage

**Key Concepts:**

- Salmon are a keystone species
- All organisms and ecosystems are interconnected

# Salmon Food Web

Lesson 1 of 1

## Background & Summary

Students explore the concept of ecosystem interdependence and salmon as a keystone species by creating a food web diagram for each stage of the salmon life cycle. During the warm-up activity, students work in small groups and make food webs based on animals of their choosing. Groups that get stuck, or think they have “completed” their web should be challenged to pick a different animal and try to build a larger food web. The questions are designed to get students thinking conceptually about food web structure, this is also a good time to introduce vocabulary words. When introducing some of the vocabulary, it may be helpful to ask the question in reverse to get a better understanding of the students’ knowledge of the topic. For example, instead of asking “what type of consumers are represented”, ask the student to describe the diet of one of the organisms, and what the dietary components have in common. Use the vocabulary word in a sentence to integrate the students’ description and explain the definition.

The main activity focuses on designing a food web for a specific salmon life cycle. The organisms included in these diagrams should be native to the Pacific Northwest. “Food Web Cards” are included as a resource to help students identify some of these organisms. Alternatively, classrooms with access to computers can encourage groups to research organisms that are not included in the “Food Web Cards”.

## Procedure

### Food Web Warm-Up Activity

1. Split students into five groups. Give each group a blank piece of paper and a pencil. Select one person (Student A) in each group to write down the name of a specific plant or animal in the center of the paper. The next student in the group (Student B) writes down a plant/animal that eats or is eaten by the plant/animal written on the paper. Student B connects those two organisms with arrow, the head of the arrow should point towards the prey. Students in the group pass the pencil and paper around and continue building upon any plant or animal written on the paper. (10 minutes)

While the students are working, go around to each group and facilitate a guided discussion using the prompts below.

- Which organisms have the most connections? Which have the least?
- What type of ecosystem do the plants or animals live in? Which share an ecosystem? Which can be found in multiple ecosystems?



## Procedure (Continued)

### Food Web vs Food Chain

#### Learning objectives:

- a. A food chain shows how energy is transferred through trophic levels
  - b. A food web is made up of all the food chains in an ecosystem.
2. Instruct the students to put their food webs aside. Don't throw them away, they are needed for the next activity. Pass out two "Trophic Diagrams" to each group. Use the diagram to walk the class through the roles of producers and consumers in a food chain. (5 minutes)

#### Key messages to share with students:

*A food chain shows how nutrients, or energy, flow from one organism to another.*

*The trophic level is an organism's position in the food chain.*

*The first trophic level is occupied by producers (organisms that make their own food). The next trophic level is primary consumers that eat producers. An apex predators occupies the highest trophic level.*

*Animals depend on the trophic level below the one they occupy for energy*

3. Provide each group with another piece of paper. Instruct them to work together to create a food chain from the food web diagram they made during the warm-up activity. The trophic levels between producer and apex predator can quickly become convoluted. Direct students to first focus on grouping organisms by three trophic levels (producers, consumers, apex predators). Then, attempt to further separate the consumers. Depending on the animals they started with, groups can choose to make a food chain using only a handful of the consumers from their food web. (10 minutes)

While the students are working, go around to each group and facilitate a guided discussion using the prompts below.

-How many trophic levels are represented?

-How many consumers are represented? What type of consumers are represented (herbivore, carnivore, omnivore)? How many producers are represented?

4. Give 4-5 students the opportunity to share with the class by re-asking some of the questions above, as time allows. (5 minutes)

### Salmon Food Web Activity

#### Learning objectives:

- a. Salmon are a keystone species
  - b. Salmon life cycle stages occupy varying trophic levels
5. Explain that the diagrams the students made first are called food webs. And they used the food webs to make a food chain (3 minutes)



## Procedure (Continued)

Key message to share with students:

*A food chain only shows a single food path for an animal. A food web shows many paths. A food web demonstrates how species in an ecosystems are interconnected*

6. Assign each group a stage of the salmon life cycle. One group can do both eggs and alevin. Stages include egg, alevin, fry, smolt, ocean adult, spawning adult. Pass out a 25x30inch post it (or any available poster paper) and instruct the class to work in their groups to create a food web diagram for the life stage they're assigned. (30 minutes)

7. Conclude the activity with a group discussion about the posters each group made. Using the questions below to guide the discussion. Encourage the class to draw conclusions by looking at the food web they made. (15 minutes)

-Which life stage had the most connections? Which had the least?

-Are there connections between any of the organisms (plant or animal) that you weren't expecting?

-Which trophic levels (producer, consumer or apex predator) would you find each salmon life stage? Note: Salmon eggs and alevin can be considered pseudo-producers since their "food" is contained in their yolk sacs.

8. Use the whiteboard at the front of the class (or even a post-it) to draw a line. On one side of the line write "Animals salmon eat" on the other side write "Animals that eat salmon". Have each group take turns shouting out a plant or animal (other than the life stage they were assigned) on their food web and write it on the board under the correct category. You should have a large group of organisms under both categories at the end. Once all the organisms have been added (or you run out of space to write) use the prompts

below to facilitate a class discussion. (15 minutes)

-What would happen if salmon were removed from the food web?

Key messages to share:

*Salmon are an essential food source for over 130 organisms.*

*This makes them a keystone species, meaning they directly impact the survival of other animals.*

*Terrestrial and marine ecosystems will collapse if salmon disappear.*

-How do humans interfere with the salmon food webs? Habitat destruction, pollution, overfishing, illegal hunting, agriculture are examples of human interference.

Key messages to share:

*Negative human interference will result in salmon becoming endangered or extinct.*

9. Ask students about their role in protecting salmon. What can they do to protect salmon and their ecosystems? Some ideas the kids have to help keep marine life healthy could include; throwing trash in the garbage can, and recycling in the recycling, or bringing lunch to school in reusable containers. Encourage students to make the connection between their actions and salmon conservation by asking them why or how their idea protects ecosystems. (5 minutes)

Key messages to share with students:

*All ecosystems are interconnected. What happens in one ecosystem can positively or negatively affect a different ecosystem.*

*We all can make small changes in our day-to-day life that will have a huge impact on salmon.*



## Extensions

### Additional Activities

#### Classroom Food Web

Create a classroom food web using strings of yarn and sticky notes. Have one student (Student A) write down a plant/animal on a sticky note, and put the sticky note on their chest (or forehead if they're feeling silly). On a separate sticky note, the next student (Student B) writes down a plant/animal that eats or is eaten by Student A. Connect those two students using a piece of yarn. Continue with each student in the class, one by one, writing down a plant/animal on the sticky note and using a piece of yarn to connect with a different student. By the end there will generally be one or two people holding FAR more strings than the rest. Those students represent keystone species for the food web they just created. This is a great activity for students to visualize the importance of a keystone species.

#### Get Specific!

For older students or those with more experience, you can use more advanced vocabulary when discussing the food chain and consumer-resource interactions. The "Wayne Getz Consumer Category Diagram" can be used to guide discussion. Challenge students to name an animal from each category.

#### Encourage Conservation Stewardship

If you want to provide your students with more examples of how they can protect salmon, check out the "How Can You Help Protect Salmon" document created by the Bureau of Land Management.

## Vocabulary to Know

**Apex Predator** – an animal at the top of the food chain without natural predators of its own

**Carnivore** – an animal that feed primarily or exclusively on animal tissue, such as muscle or fat

**Consumer** – an organism that can not produce its owns food and instead must consumer other organisms to survive

**Food Chain** – a single path that illustrates the flow of nutrients from one trophic level to another

**Food Web** – multiple paths that illustrate the connection between all the food chains in an ecosystem

**Herbivore** – animals that feed on producers



## Vocabulary (Continued)

**Keystone Species** – an organism that holds an ecosystem together

**Producer** – an organism that can produce its own food using light, water, carbon dioxide, or other chemicals

**Trophic Level** – the position an organism occupies in a food chain or food web

## Materials

**Included:** You can request to borrow laminated versions of the diagrams below  
11 – Trophic Diagrams  
11 – Wayne Getz Consumer Category Diagrams

**Not Included:**

Pencil and Paper (Loose Leaf, Notebook or Journal)  
5 to 10 computers connected to WiFi (1-2 for each group)  
5 – 25" x 30" Post-It Notes (or any paper to make a poster)

## Next Generation Science Standards

### Life Science

#### LS2 – Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

5-LS2-1: Develop a model to describe the movement of matter among plants, animals, decomposers, and the environment.

#### PS3 – Energy

4-PS3-2: Make observations to provide evidence that energy can be transferred from place to place by sound, light, heat, and electric currents.

5-PS3-1: Use models to describe that energy in animals' food (used for body repair, growth, motion, and to maintain body warmth) was once energy from the sun.



## Common Core Standards

### English Language Arts

#### Speaking and Listening

4.1/5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

4.4/5.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

#### Language Standards

4.4.a/5.4.a Use context (e.g., definitions, examples, or restatements in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

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